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University City

Proposal
for
Development of Unimproved
Land Adjacent
to
The University of Illinois
by
J. F. Hessel

September, 1926

ILLINOIS HISTORICAL SURVEY

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UNIVERSITY CITY

PROPOSAL

FOR

DEVELOPMENT OF UNIMPROVED LAND ADJACENT

TO

THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

BY

J. F. HESSEL

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CHAMPAIGN, ILLINOIS

FOREWORD

I

The index to the wealth, character and growth of a city are its buildings;
The great structures, imposing edifices and artistic dwellings,
That attract the eye of the stranger, as he steps within its portals.
These reflect not only upon the character of the city,
But the character of its citizens as well.
They may be expressions of the old pioneer spirit
That converted our wet black prairies
Into the best farms in the world.

II

The pioneer of today in attempting to plan for
The amenities of a worthwhile American City,
Represents another step forward in the evolution of time.
We are wont to believe the work of the pioneer has been completed.
We associate in our minds with him, the hardships, the disappointments and the sacrifices
Of days gone by, and sometimes we fail to realize
That each decade, or at least each epoch
Must have the pioneer spirit and the pioneer, just as truly as did the early day of our prairies.

III

The sturdy men and women of that day performed their work well.
They transformed the wet black prairies into the best farms in the world;
They laid the foundation for our villages and our towns;
They erected school houses and places of worship according to their means.
We, today, enjoy the fruits of their labors.
On their foundation we must continue to build.
With the newer vision, of better homes and better towns;
We must endeavor to turn our dreams into happy realities for the people.

IV

We visit cities older than ours by a century,
And marvel at their richness and their beauty.
We compare them with our own and wish that ours were the same.
We forget to take into consideration the element of time.
With the proper vision to guide us on, and the determination to do,
What can not be accomplished as the years go by?
TRULY, THE WORK OF THE CITY PIONEER IS BEFORE US.

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INTRODUCTION

CONSIDERABLE time and thought for twelve years has been devoted to undeveloped areas contignons to the city of Champaign, more particularly that portion adjoining the city on the south, between the Illinois Central railway, which separates the University holdings on the east, westward to Prospect avenue (extended).

During this period the point has been emphasized, frequently that this area should be given special treatment, so as to provide in advance a development that would harmonize with that of the University of Illinois, in its gradual growth southward, by protecting that portion on the west side of the Illinois Central as far as the Prospect avenue road against an inferior or haphazard development.

The first contribution along this line is the park and boulevard development, known as the Highland Place, extending from University of Illinois to Country Club, one mile east and west, abreast with the University for which a permanent foundation for a super-residential area has been successfully accomplished.

In the early literature, outlining this development reference has been made to a larger and more extended plan that was contemplated for the future development of this and adjacent areas, far exceeding anything so far attempted in this locality, and which would be released for publication at an opportune time.

Owing to the difficulties encountered in obtaining proper cooperation, it was recently concluded to abandon any further efforts towards carrying out the larger plan contemplated. Pressure, however, has been brought to bear to continue the work and in compliance therewith it has been concluded, at least, to go so far as to release the plan for publication.

This publication is the first of a series to appear in connection with this proposal and presents the tentative design, showing a preliminary general outline, and a few of the different features under consideration of which subsequent publications will treat more in detail.

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PLAN FOR NEW DEVELOPMENT

The plan for the new development will be found to offer the following proposals:

First:—Southside park and boulevard facilities that will blend the University park system with the park system of the city of Champaign.

Second:—A proposed subway at Kirby avenue.

Third:—An open area between the two subways (Kirby avenue proposed subway and Catholic Cemetery subway) extending from Illinois Central railroad, westward, to Prospect avenue. These two subways one at the north and one at the south end of this tract offer accessibility, westward, for the University's holdings on the east. This plan offers either all of the use of the above described area, to the University of Illinois for open spaces and University building purposes, or its joint use with the city of Champaign, the west half for a municipal park and the east half for the use of the University of Illinois. Other possibilities for this area include; an eighteen hole golf course, a botanical garden, or arboretum, or sites for educational, religious and civic building groups. This offers practical possibilities for the development of open areas, at an opportune time in advance of any civic development, that does not take these possibilities into consideration.

Fourth:—A town-site, south of the park area described above, consisting of about 300 acres of what is now known as the Mattis farm, to be carefully planned and designed as a foundation for an ideal municipality to be known as University City. Such a town development would furnish the opportunity for the establishment of an equally ideal municipal government.

Fifth:—Also a state wide sales organization to be completed as a part of the program offered.

Sixth:—The general policy to be adopted is the encouragement of the outsider to locate here, so as to increase community population, rather than the distribution of the property in the hands of local investors.

CITY PLANNING AND THE PROPERLY CONCEIVED PLAN

A well conceived plan for undeveloped areas for residential and business purposes is an asset to the land, rather than a liability.

It is an asset to both present and future generation for timely provision of necessary and desirable features, the allotment of certain spaces for given purposes in advance and the visualizing of these possibilities through a comprehensive plan. This is indispensable where it is desired to prevent haphazard ill-regulated growth.

The psycology of a well conceived development plan, is that it concentrates the individual and public mind upon the future possibilities offered. It results in a subconscious and involuntary action upon the part of the public, towards gradual and progressive consummption of the plan.

It is a great mistake to donate land for free public use where that use is

left to be determined by the public consisting of many minds, view points and personal interests. Oftentimes this results in less value to the public welfare, than if such land were held under a definite plan, dominated and directed by a master hand and encouraging public interest towards its proper and speedy development. In the latter cases the individual who invests obtains his share and the public who receives, also becomes the beneficiary.

A FEW OF THE UNDERLYING PURPOSES

THE primary object of this plan is to preserve and hold intact for all time to come all the area, lying west of the Illinois Central and south directly opposite the University's holdings on the east, under certain restrictions, for the attainment of recent definite results.

One of these purposes is to harmonize the development of this portion of the city of Champaign with the University development as a distinct asset for the community at large and to assure a congenial atmosphere for the future growth and expansion of the University, the tendency of which is, southward.

Another purpose is that of providing an open area west of the Illinois Central Railroad, between two subways connecting the University holdings on the east, and offer the possibility of a well conceived park system which may be used all or in part by the University or for some other favorable purpose.

By this treatment, a direct contact and connection is afforded with the park and boulevard system already provided on the north, creating a southside Park and Boulevard system that would be ideal in many respects.

Also by this treatment the city of Champaign opens up its arms more than ever, to the University of Illinois, in conforming its city planning scheme to the future growth and expansion of the University south and west, with the city of Urbana in the enjoyment of the direct benefits to be derived; thus establishing a closer and more intimate contact in civic development, with this great institution.

The trinity of our community development therefore must be the city of Champaign, the University of Illinois and the city of Urbana, between whom, there should be no rivalries.

I offer this plan as my second contribution towards the creation of a proper community spirit, which I feel should now be encouraged in the consideration of all things offered for community betterment and the public welfare.

THE PRELIMINARY SKETCH

1—In analyzing the preliminary sketch on pages eight and nine it should be kept in mind that the view is towards the south and that the road shown in the top of the sketch as "South Road" is the first road running east and west, south of the Mattis farm, which outlines the southern boundary of the town site, the north boundary being outlined by a boulevard shown in sketch as "M" boulevard, which is a continuation west to Prospect Avenue of the road terminating on Neil Street at the Catholic Cemetery subway.

2—The open space between "M" boulevard on the north and Kirby avenue on the south from Neil street to Prospect avenue, approximating 100 acres,

shows the park area reserved for the University of Illinois and the city of Champaign.

3—To conform to the title, University City, the names of different Universities are used with few exceptions, in the naming of streets, avenues and boulevards.

4—Names of streets, boulevards and avenues:

M-Boulevard (north boundary line)
Amherst Road
Brown Road
Northwestern Avenue
Princeton Way
Oxford Road
Harvard Road
Cornell Avenue
Yale Drive
Outer Drive (Boulevard encircling the city)
South Road (south boundary line)

5—M-BOULEVARD, outlines the southern boundary of University City, which is a continuation westward of the catholic cemetery road, straight through to Prospect Avenue.

6—OUTER-DRIVE, shows a circular boulevard encircling the city for special treatments as an important residential thoroughfare.

7—THE KEY MAP, (on the left) of general locality shows relative location of:

Stadium
Park Area
Highland Place
University City
City of Champaign
Champaign Country Club.

8—OVERLOOK PARK, with park strips, a portion of which may later be converted into store strips, along line of Neil Street frontage, making a most artistic border line and landscape screen facing railroad and station.

9—While this plan shows that the city of Champaign and University City will be connected up by two old established routes, Neil Street on the east and Prospect Avenue on the west, this plan contemplates a very unique central connection by the formation of a circular boulevard or double loop driveway, shows in sketch on the University City side as Crescent Drive, which couples up with a similar or corresponding driveway encircling Hessel Park on the Champaign side.

10—The small key map on pages eight and nine gives a much better idea of this connection, showing the boulevard encircling a park center. It is not difficult to visualize what the possibilities of the future will be in the development along thi sboulevard, so advantageously located as it is, between two growing municipalities.

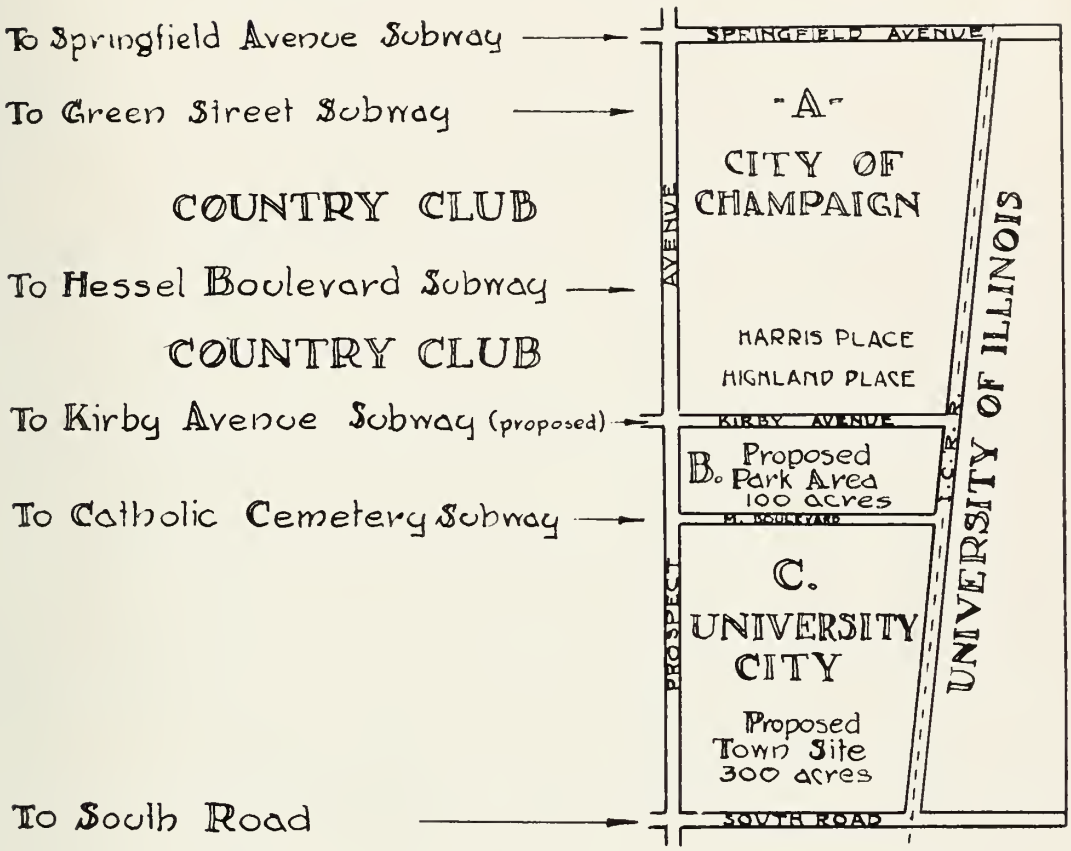
11—Municipal gardens, community buildings, play ground areas, school sites, and city buildings grouped around a central park area, towards which the different thoroughfares centralized, are some of the attractive features of this design.

DIAGRAM MAP

of the

AREA UNDER CONSIDERATION

A—City of Champaign (north)
B—Proposed Park Area (between)
C—Proposed Town Site (south)



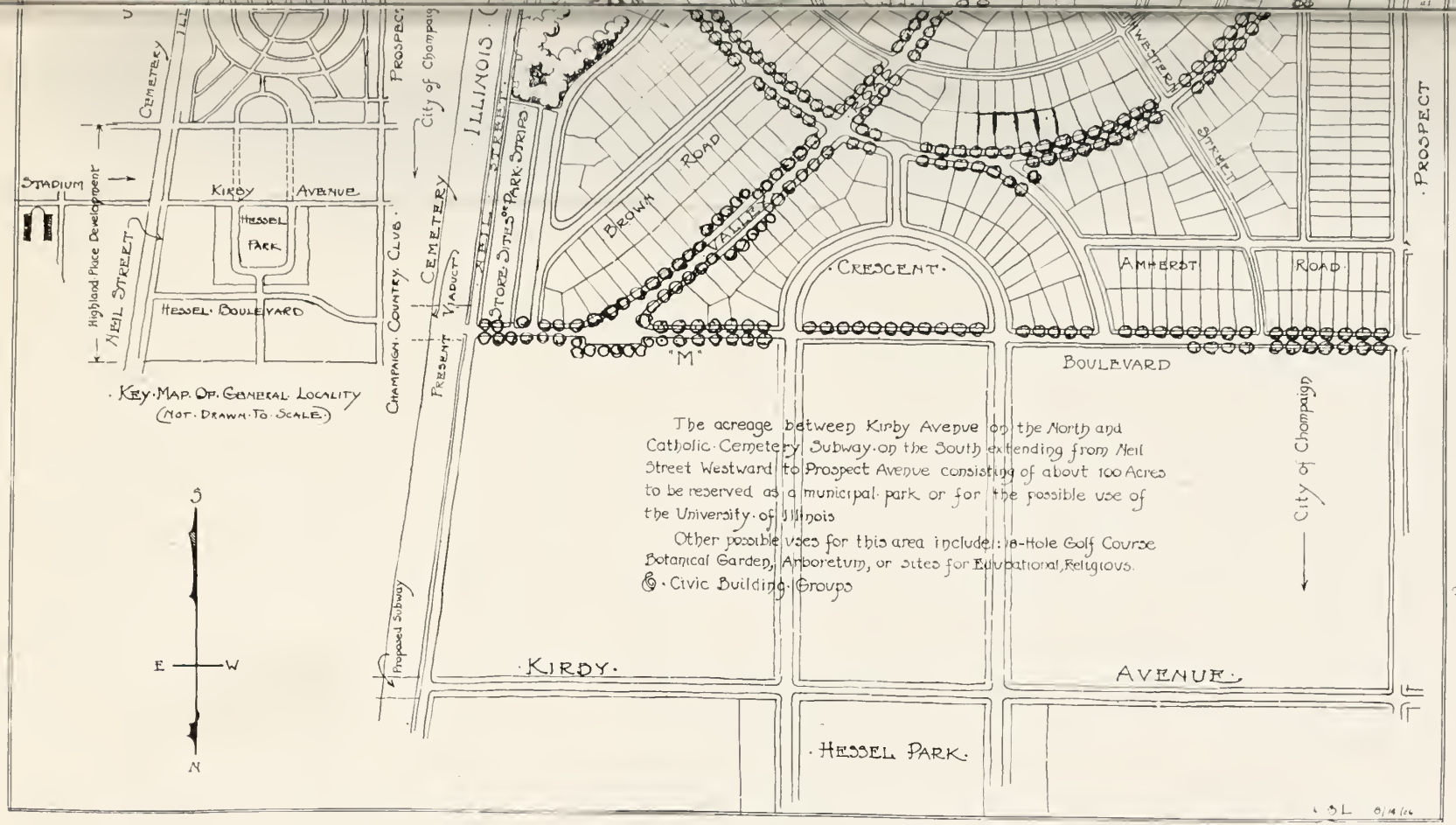
The above diagram shows the relative location of the development around the area under consideration.

A—Shows the city of Champaign on the north with Harris Place and Highland Place, defining the development on the southern boundary of the city at Kirby Avenue.

B—Defines the boundary line of the proposed park area located between the city of Champaign and the proposed town site, extending from Kirby Avenue on the south to the catholic cemetery subway road on the south, consisting of about 100 acres.

C—Defines the boundary lines of the proposed town site, extending from the catholic cemetery to the south road, comprising about 300 acres.

D—Shows the relative location of driveways leading to various subways as noted on the left hand margin.



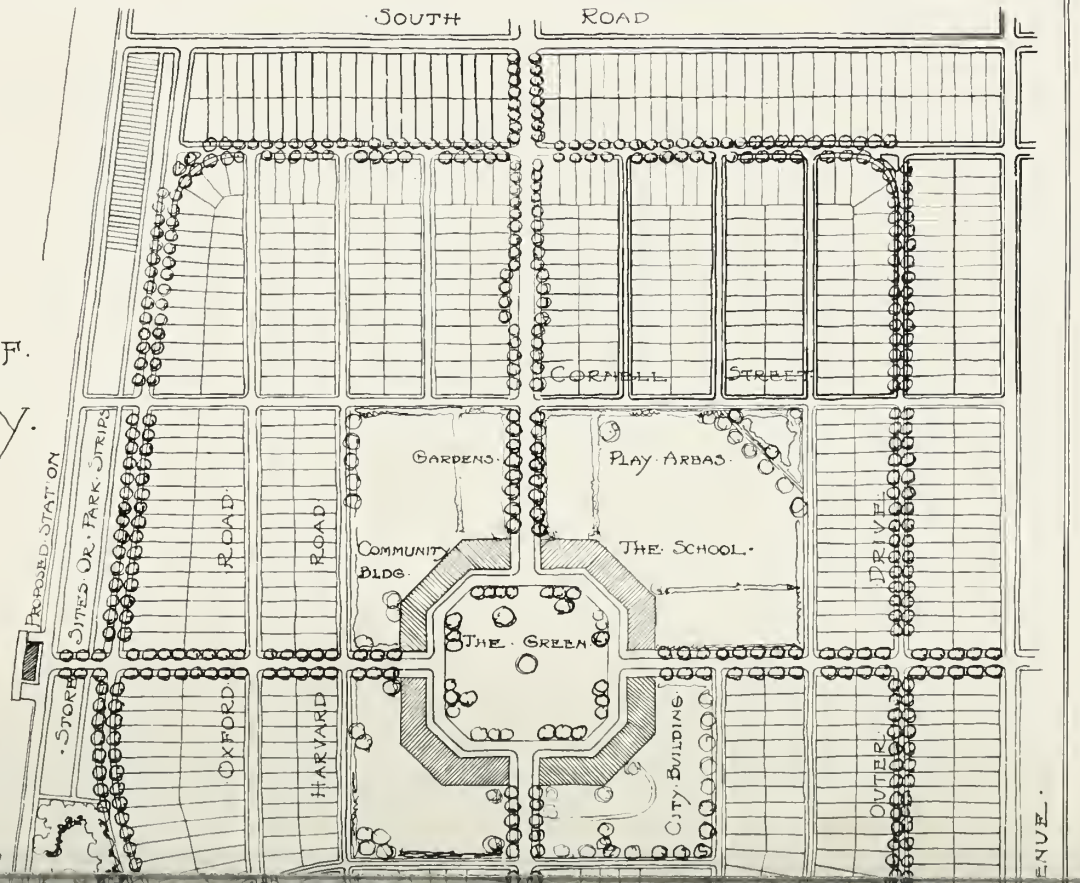
The acreage between Kirby Avenue on the North and Catholic Cemetery Subway on the South extending from Neil Street Westward to Prospect Avenue consisting of about 100 Acres to be reserved as a municipal park or for the possible use of the University of Illinois

Other possible uses for this area include: 18-Hole Golf Course Botanical Garden, Arboretum, or sites for Educational, Religious & Civic Building Groups

PRELIMINARY
GENERAL SKETCH
FOR DEVELOPMENT OF
UNIVERSITY CITY

CHAMPAIGN · ILLINOIS

SCALE 1" = 200'



FUTURE TRI-CITIES

Champaign—Urbana—University City

More Community Population—More Industries—More Prestige

It is not difficult to visualize the future possibilities of "The Tri-Cities" with such a plan, permanently established for its gradual development.

The possibilities of a "Tri-City" development would be a most active stimulant, not only to the growth of "The Twin-Cities;" but also to the growth and expansion of the University of Illinois in offering a most inviting residential area, surrounded by ideal conditions, fully restricted and protected for all time to come.

CONCLUSION

Ten years ago there was not one in a hundred who felt that track elevation, south of Green Street was feasible or even possible within several decades and for that matter, a life time.

Nothing of this kind ten years ago was ever considered or even contemplated by any other community interest as a feasible possibility at that time.

This is evidenced in the attempt to push through a viaduct project over the railroad by parties whose knowledge of these things were far in advance of the average citizen.

This affords a very good example of what may be brought about within one decade and also goes to show that the things we feel cannot be accomplished today or considered even feasible, may at the end of this decade, become an accomplished reality.

If only the alloted span of life could be increased, what wonderful things we could see here and what many surprises the next decade would now open up to our vision. Unfortunate, it is, that many of us, lack this vision to see.

PART II

DEVELOPMENT

of the

LANDS TO THE NORTH

of the

PROPOSED UNIVERSITY CITY DEVELOPMENT

HIGHLAND PLACE DEVELOPMENT

The illustration on page twelve shows the foundation already permanently established for a super-residential area. The scheme which is now rapidly approaching realization provides as its principle features, the following:

FRATERNITY SITES: In a careful survey of the situation, with both citizens and parties connected with the University, it is the consensus of opinion that this district holds the logical location for future fraternity sites.

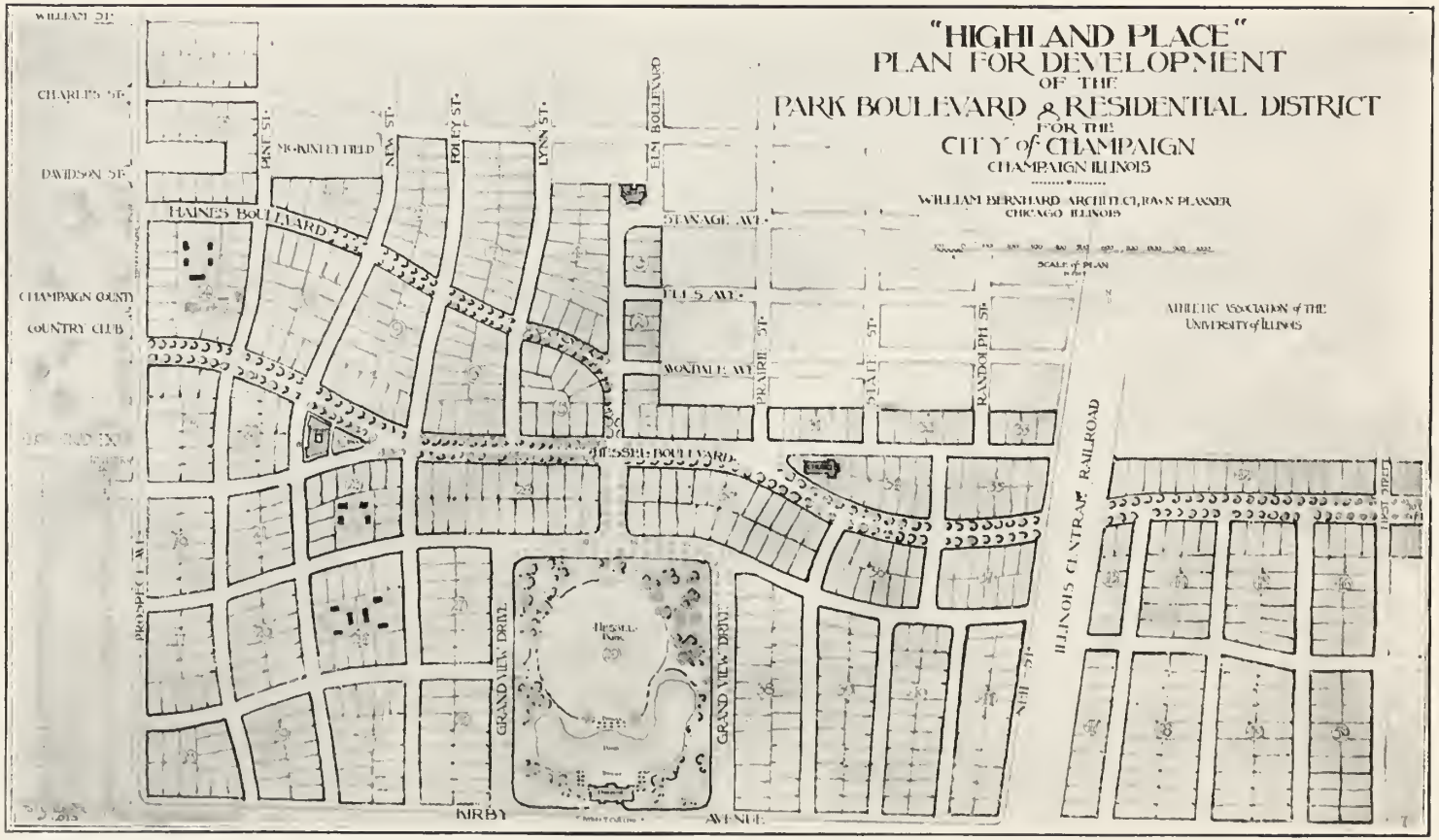
One of the reasons given for arriving at this conclusion, is, that it is the only open space anywhere near the University where there is sufficient desirable area, with proper restrictions, making it possible to create a permanent distinctive fraternity zone with possibilities for its future expansion.

And furthermore what is still most important, there is no location close-in other than this where it is possible to have any given area held indefinitely for most any length of time for this distinctive purpose, without the fear sometime in the future of coming in contact with something out of harmony therewith.

The portion most favorable for this purpose, it has been decided, is Hessel boulevard, around the north park entrance. The great width of this boulevard (120 feet) with buildings set back upon an established building line, throwing traffic at its maximum distance, gives an opportunity in showing pretentious fraternity buildings to the very best advantage, located on the high points abounding, with commanding views of the University Campus.

A park ajoining these sites, offers also exceptional expansion facilities for fraternities, clustering around the park with all the advantages that this park area would naturally hold for a development of this kind.

APARTMENT AND BUSINESS ZONES: Apartment and business zones will be worked out along the north and east border line of the development. The east border line facing Neil Street will be used for industrial sites, and Hessel boulevard for at least one block westward from Neil Street will be reserved for apartment sites, using an established building line and conforming to other regulations governing desirable structures of this character.



"Highland Place" plan for development of the boulevard and residential district for the city of Champaign, Illinois.

FOUNDATIONS: Moving westward on Hessel boulevard reservations will be made for foundations and such public and quasi-public buildings as will harmonize with them and the fraternity section adjoining on the west.

ALTITUDE: One of the attractive features for this area and one of the primary reasons why it was selected for this particular character of development is, its location on a high plateau, many feet higher than the residential districts in other parts of the city, abounding in many high points, giving a commanding view of the University and surrounding territory.

COUNTRY CLUB AND PARKS: The Champaign Country Club along its western border line, together with extensive park areas as shown in illustration page twelve provides the necessary recreational facilities so desirable in developments of this character.

TRANSPORTATION: A bus line system of transportation to be established connecting up all important centers.

HAINES BOULEVARD AND RESIDENTIAL AREA: Haines boulevard (80 feet wide) extending diagonally westward from Elm boulevard to Prospect Avenue, with tributaries leading into it from the north and the south, into which many thousands of dollars of public improvements are now being constructed consisting of pavements, sewers, drainage, sidewalks and lighting system marks the commencement of a superior residential section; that all may rest assured will meet the expectations of the most exacting.

HESSEL BOULEVARD: Hessel boulevard one mile west to Prospect Avenue on account of its great width and desirable frontage will be reserved for pretentious structures along the line suggested above, assuring a most imposing and satisfactory thoroughfare for all time to come.

THE BOULEVARD SYSTEM: This development contains "The Heart of the Boulevard System" without which a boulevard system for the city of Champaign and Urbana, on an extensive scale, would have been quite an impossibility.

The section between Prospect Avenue and First street as planned ten years or more ago, with a constant plea for adequate subway crossings over the Illinois Central in order to obtain a University contact, now furnishes in its final accomplishment the important key to the locked up possibilities of our community development.

HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT

Twelve years ago, the plan for this project was conceived and presented to the public.

It was more of a question at that time whether this plateau, so naturally adapted for special treatment should be allowed to drift into a haphazard development or something done to hold it intact as a superior residential area and its development placed under control and directed towards something that would harmonize with the University of Illinois and become a future asset to the city of Champaign.

Attempts were made to organize and influence others to join in the purchasing of all the land for this purpose which were unsuccessful.

In assuming the sole responsibility of purchasing the land it was done with the understanding that it would be held for a super-development of this kind, provided proper cooperation would be given in first obtaining a subway connection with the University of Illinois, as the key to the situation, without which no action towards this end would be undertaken.

Two Ways Open

In considering the development of this area, two methods were open to the operator, either to handle it as a real estate proposition for immediate action without regard to University contacts, subways or arbitrary restrictions; but for immediate gain and profit and with the minimum amount of overhead charges, or to hold it for the ideal development in which the element of time and the cooperation of others had to be considered, entailing overhead charges in the way of interest, taxes, improvements and upkeep which would naturally follow in its wake.

In following the latter course considerably over $100,000 in addition to the cost of the land has already been expended in overhead charges in holding this area intact for the last ten years *for this particular purpose*.

In handling this situation, it was necessary to arbitrarily follow a conservative business program in guarding against financial hazards and the consequent destruction of the whole plan.

The Policy Adopted

The policy adopted in doing this was not to attempt to include in the already overburdened account of overhead charges necessary to hold so large an area indefinitely for a superior development, anything additional for extensive public improvements for the encouragement of immediate building construction until the character of the buildings to be erected in this area were first fully determined.

This could not be determined until the possibilities of a subway connection were first fully assured. If it were found impossible to obtain a University connection or further opposition and delays were encountered, an inferior development would be necessary to substitute for the restricted one originally outlined.

This now being thoroughly understood it is not difficult for any one to see why building construction in this locality has been held back so many years and why such heroic measures were resorted to in forcing a south side subway into the Illinois Central contract at an opportune time.

As time rolls by and these facts are becoming much better understood, the consensus of public opinion is fast crystalizing into a justification of the wisdom of a policy that has preserved intact a superior development project *as a future asset for the city of Champaign*.

After ten years of effort, subway connections to the University have been finally accomplished and immediately $50,000 in public improvements were ordered into this area.

Growth Retarded—Why?

A few volunteer lot purchasers in the early days of development felt in their optimism, as we all did at that time, that the possibilities were such that

the plans outlined could be speedily pushed forward within the next few years, with little or no delay.

Waiting indefinitely, during all this trying period, for a University subway connection, the essential thing necessary in order to make such a development possible and free from financial hazard, encumbered as it was by the world's war, naturally created more or less impatience and criticism over what might have been thought to be unnecessary delays. Moreover, the difficulty was found to be the impossibility of encouraging proper thought and study to be given the project as a whole, so as to determine the reasonableness of a demand any party might desire to make.

Integrity Maintained

It is gratifying, however, to know that the integrity of this development has been successfully maintained, from start to finish, in carrying out the plans and the agreements originally proposed and cannot be successfully assailed or impeached by anyone, upon any issue taken, based upon the actual facts as shown in the carefully preserved files and records of the past twelve years.

It must also be remembered that if it had not been financially possible to have held this tract for the ideal proposed development, which fortunately has been kept strictly in line, during all this period, at an expenditure of many thousands of dollars and surrendered to the discouragements encountered, from time to time, that the criticisms of today would now far exceed the criticisms of the past.

In the light of what we know now, we can readily see what this loss would have been to the community had it been necessary to have substituted an ill regulated civic growth for the proposed restricted area, now resting upon a permanent foundation for all time to come.

So after all, whether we do or whether we don't, a certain amount of criticism must be expected and philosophically taken with as much good natured tolerance as it is humanly possible to give.

Patience, conscientious endeavor and persistency of purpose overcomes many obstacles. The crowning reward for the hardships encountered in undertaking any given task, is in its ultimate and successful accomplishment. *TO THIS TASK ARE THESE PLANS NOW DEDICATED.*

THE LAST DECADE

(1916-1926)

Ten years ago a twelve page illustrated pamphlet was published entitled, "The Destinty of a City," outlining a tentative plan for a two hundred acre park, boulevard and super-residential development in the City of Champaign, Illinois.

This pamphlet was published at that time, primarily in the interest of track elevation and subways, in opposition to a plan advocating viaducts over the railroad, instead of subways under the tracks, calling for condemnation suits and possible damage suits against the city by property owners.

Not only this; but for the fear that if successfully carried out it would retard, if not altogether destroy all possibilities of ever obtaining track elevation and subways, so necessary for the broader development contemplated for this area.

The liberty is taken of quoting the last paragraph from this pamphlet as follows:

"The Destiny of the City of Champaign"

"1. Population (Champaign-Urbana) 50,000?

2. Track Elevation (The Removal of the Iron Jacket)?

3. Location of a Military Training School for the Middle West?

4. A Model Municipal Government for the Twin Cities of Champaign and Urbana, as a natural result of the University environment and its teachings; to be used as a standard for other cities to emulate?"

Ten years ago these four items were published prescribing a few of the possibilities of the future. We now ask: What has the last decade given us?

First: Population of Champaign-Urbana approximating 40,000.

Second: Track elevation and subways, successfully accomplished.

Third: The location of a military school here for the middle west, so strongly advocated at that time, probably to be substituted by the great transformation of things military, as a result of the world's war, for something pertaining to aviation.

Fourth: In speaking of a model municipal government, our steady progress towards an inland metropolis of a higher order, within the last decade, shows that some progress along this line is being made.

No difference, however, what form of municipal government it may be, aldermanic, commission, or manager form it will never become perfect. Perfection in government is as impossible as individual perfection. The only way that either government or individual may approximate perfection is by a *proper check and balance.*

Lithomount
Pamphlet
Binder
Gaylord Bros.
Makers
Syracuse, N. Y.
PAT. JAN 21. 1908

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